

EXHIBIT EE

US immigration

US issues broad order to consulates to vet student visas over 'terrorist activity'

State department shares new standard for denials based on social media posts, financial donations and memberships



People rally in support of Rumeysa Ozturk in Somerville, Massachusetts, on Tuesday. Photograph: Faith Ninivaggi/Reuters

Joseph Gedeon in Washington

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The United States has ordered consular offices to significantly expand their screening processes for student visa applicants, including through comprehensive social media investigations, to exclude people they deem to support terrorism.

Coming after several high-profile visa revocations and targeted arrests over pro-Palestinian campus activism, a state department cable from 25 March, obtained by the Guardian, describes a new standard for visa denials based on a broad definition of what constitutes support for "terrorist activity". The directive states that "evidence that an applicant advocates for terrorist activity, or otherwise demonstrates a degree of public approval or public advocacy for terrorist activity or a terrorist organization" can be grounds for visa rejection.

It specifically targets new and renewing F, M and J student visa applications, providing explicit instructions for consular officers to conduct mandatory social media reviews digging into applicants' lives online. Officers are directed to examine the social media of all students applying to a visa for evidence of activities the administration defines as a threat to national security or terrorism.

The directive mandates that fraud prevention units, which receive flagged applications, take screenshots of "potentially derogatory" social media content, creating a permanent digital record that can be used to deny entry. Those officers are instructed to preserve screenshots "to the extent it is relevant to a visa ineligibility" and upload them to the applicant's case record - even if the posts are later altered or deleted.


"Evidence that an applicant advocates for terrorist activity or otherwise demonstrates a degree of public approval or public advocacy for terrorist

activity or a terrorist organization may be indicative of ineligibility,” reads the memo, sent by the secretary of state, Marco Rubio. “This may be evident in conduct that bears a hostile attitude towards US citizens or US culture, including government institutions or founding principles.”

The memo says the vetting process should extend to students in the US as of 7 October 2023 whose visas are up for renewal, noting the day that Hamas led an attack on Israel, prompting Israel’s subsequent barrage of airstrikes and ground invasion that have amounted to more than 50,000 people reported killed.

In recent weeks, the government has revoked the visas of a number of students it claims have expressed support for Hamas. The new procedures are certain to prompt concerns that social media posts supportive of the Palestinians, that contain critical commentary on US foreign policy, or that indicate attendance at a campus protest could trigger a comprehensive visa review.

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The cable does not require visa denials to be predicated on explicit support for any specific group, and goes beyond traditional security screening, allowing officers to investigate an applicant’s relationships with organizations, including current membership, financial contributions or other forms of support.

The state department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The new order lands amid an already intensifying crackdown on pro-Palestinian activists nationwide. Rubio on Thursday said he had revoked **more than 300 visas**, targeting what he calls “lunatics” connected to campus protests. The latest example is the **capture of Rumeysa Ozturk**, a Turkish Fulbright scholar at Tufts University, who was detained by plainclothes agents wearing masks in broad daylight.

The updated screening process references two of Trump’s early term executive orders focused on foreign terrorists and combating antisemitism.

“Every visa decision is a national security decision,” the memo reads.

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